



The ancients believed that how long people lived and the destinies of mortals were regulated by three sister-goddesses, called Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, who were the daughters of Zeus and Themis.

The power that they wielded [held] over the fate of man was symbolized by the thread of life, which they spun out for the life of each human being from his birth to the grave. They divided this job between them. Clotho wound the flax around the distaff [a stick or spindle], ready for her sister Lachesis, who spun out the thread of life, which Atropos, with her scissors, relentlessly snipped asunder [apart], when the life of an individual was about to terminate [end].

The Fates represent the moral force by which the universe is governed. Both mortals and immortals were forced to submit to this force; even Zeus is powerless to prevent the Fates' orders. The Fates, or Moiræ, are the special deities that rule over the life and death of mortals.

Poets describe the Moiræ as stern, inexorable [impossible to stop or prevent] female divinities. They are aged, hideous, and also lame, which is meant to show the slow and halting march of destiny, which they controlled. They were thought of as prophetic divinities.

Adapted from: Berens, E. M. "Moiræ or Fates (Parcæ)". *Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome*. New York: Maynard, Merrill and Co., 1894. 139–141. Web. 7 June 2013. Public domain.